

How did you do that? Well, kind of like this...

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Have you ever asked someone for directions and tried to follow them? "Turn left on Mississippi, then a right at the second. . . . no third traffic light, then the road will kind of split and you will take the right fork. It looks sort of like it goes straight but, it really is the right fork. Then you will go to the fourth stop sign, and make a left. The opera house is the blue house next to the two yellow houses, near the second intersection past the curve at the top of the hill. You can't miss it." Next thing you know your lost and you have to stop and get directions again. More than likely, the person who gave you these directions felt like they really helped you out while you feel the person who gave you directions was a total nitwit.

This misunderstanding in communication could happen for several reasons. First, the person who gave you directions already had a visual image of the places of which he was speaking while these places are yet to be discovered by yourself. The direction giver has much more experience with the "territory" than yourself. Second, as you listen and process the directions, you are creating your own ideas of what this landscape you are attempting to navigate will look like. You more than likely are creating images in your head based on things you have experienced before. In short, communicating what we mean to another person is an extremely difficult task, even though we do it every day.

Think for a second about brushing your teeth in the morning. Imagine that you are already in the bathroom standing in front of the sink. List the steps you must follow to accomplish the task of brushing your teeth and leaving the bathroom. One's list may look like this:

How to Brush Your Teeth

1. Get toothbrush and toothpaste
2. Put toothpaste on toothbrush.
3. Run toothbrush under stream of water.
4. Put toothbrush in your mouth and move back and forth and in tiny circles.
5. Spit out toothpaste
6. Rinse mouth and toothbrush.
7. Put toothbrush and toothpaste away.
8. Leave the bathroom.

Now let's say I try to follow your directions. Keep in mind I have never brushed my teeth before. I look for the toothbrush and toothpaste under the sink, in the shower, in the medicine cabinet. I finally find the toothbrush and toothpaste in the top right drawer. I put the toothpaste on the toothbrush handle. After all, I had no idea that the bristles were there for a reason; I have never done this before. I run the toothbrush, the whole toothbrush, under a stream of very hot water. Next, I hold the toothbrush with one hand on each end; I place the middle of the brush in my mouth and move the brush in somewhat of a side-to-side motion and around in small circles on my tongue. Then, I spit on the floor, I rinse my mouth and the toothbrush, and I put away the toothbrush and toothpaste and leave the bathroom with the water still on. In this case, I did follow your list of steps; however, I have a sneaking suspicion that the way I brushed my teeth using your list of steps was not at all what you intended.

How does this translate into color guard? Explaining techniques and the steps to choreography are very difficult. In the activity of color guard, we strive to have several people do many things the exact same way. For example, your color guard has a very specific way to do a drop spin while another guard may do them differently. Do you grab in the silk or on the pole, do you start from right shoulder or from another position, do you grab every count straight up and down or at an angle? And, would a person learning a drop spin for the first time, know what you are talking about if you use words like silk, pole, or right shoulder? There are so many variables to communicating when we are teaching another person.

Here are my suggestions for people who wish to teach another person or a group of people a color guard technique or choreography. Just as when giving travel directions or making a list of steps for an everyday activity, you must be very specific with your language, and provide visual images of exactly what you need (when possible). The more details you include, the better the chance that you will achieve the results you are looking for. One of the great things about teaching color guard is you are there to be the example.

To be as efficient as possible when explaining things, I follow a three-step process.

- Step one: **LEAD** the activity while explaining the details. Include all the information you have to communicate to another person exactly what you are looking for.
- Step two: **MODEL** exactly what you want your student to do. Have them watch and observe you doing the things you are explaining.
- Step three: **TEST** the student to see if you need to explain something in more detail, or if you need to clarify something that didn't travel the line of communication very smoothly.

This three step process gives the explainer the opportunity to provide the learner both visual and verbal background. Thus, the learner has some knowledge of what they are being asked to do. Then, the learner is able to observe the explainer. This lets the learner absorb things that the explainer may not even think to explain. Finally, the explainer has an opportunity to observe the learner. Then the explainer can begin the three-step teaching process over to better the learner's understanding of the material.